

April 2010

Maryland DNR Fisheries Service

Blue Crab Fishery Disaster Grant Projects

This is a summary of projects funded by the NMFS Blue Crab Fishery Disaster Grant. Projects are identified with a number and letter consistent with the NMFS proposal.

- **Project 1A(i): Restructure the blue crab fishery and license buybacks**

Budget: \$6,005,500

Maryland currently has 6,200 licensed commercial crabbers, only 1,800 (29%) actively fished between 2004 and 2007. The number of latent and possibly active, commercial crab licenses must be reduced in order to ensure a viable fishery supporting full-time watermen.

Project 1A(ii): Evaluate “catch share management” for application to the blue crab fishery

Budget: \$500,000

MD DNR has contracted, and is collaborating with the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) and fishery management experts from the Bay and around the country to discuss and evaluate the current licensing and management structure of the blue crab fishery. Both industry and DNR staff will participate. EDF will also host learning sessions for watermen, conduct industry economic survey and analysis, and draft design workshops.

- **Project 1B: Management Supported Stock Assessment and Cooperative Research Projects / Electronic Harvest Reporting System**

Budget: \$1,811,303

The 2009 NOAA Chesapeake Bay Stock Assessment Committee (CBSAC) Blue Crab Crab Advisory Working Group recommended that the Bay jurisdictions explore technologies that would improve the reliability and timeliness of commercial harvest reporting. Additional information will facilitate the restructuring of the Chesapeake Bay commercial blue crab fishery, and ensure the implementation of effective and equitable management strategies. Maryland will expand its cooperative data collection program and conduct a benchmark assessment of the blue crab population.

- **Project 1C: Improved Enforcement**

Budget: \$800,000

This project will improve the ability of Maryland’s Natural Resources Police to enforce fishery regulations on the water. For example, the “blue crab strike force program” will employ multiple strategies such as side scan sonar (detect unmarked crab pots), saturation patrols, surveillance and covert operations, shoreline inspections, seafood dealer inspections, and crab-house and restaurant inspections.

- **Project 1D: Maryland Crabmeat Quality Assurance Program**

Budget: \$633,658

Funding is being provided to the University of Maryland and Maryland’s crab processing industry to provide quality control inspections of soft and peeler crabs and processed crab meat in Maryland. This will allow continuation of the currently unfunded program that ensures that safe and high quality crabmeat products are available to Maryland consumers. It will also allow investigations into new processing methods such as improved removal of shell pieces from crabmeat, innovative and safe packaging design and similar activities, which would keep Maryland’s industry competitive in an increasingly global seafood market.

- **Project 2A: Oyster Aquaculture Training and Education**

Budget: \$300,000

Commercial crabbers will be given the opportunity to learn through hands-on field and classroom settings about profitable shellfish farming, best management practices and current Maryland aquaculture laws and regulations. Fundamentals could include hatchery operations (short course),

seed production (remote setting), nursery operations, data and analysis for growers, managing oyster grounds for profit, and predator control techniques, etc.

Project 2B: Oyster Aquaculture Infrastructure Grants

Budget: \$1,200,000

Oyster aquaculture infrastructure grants will be offered to ‘certified’ watermen (see above) in all Maryland counties where shellfish aquaculture can become a viable business.

- **Project 2C: Watermen Heritage Tourism Training Program**

Budget: \$428,697

This project will provide Maryland watermen, a community of individuals and businesses that are negatively impacted by the decline in shellfish and finfish populations, with the knowledge, skills, abilities and connections to participate in or develop heritage and geo-tourism businesses associated with Maryland’s history, environment and maritime heritage, especially the Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail. Over a three-year period, this funding will provide tuition to 75-100 individuals to participate in the training program to supplement their annual fisheries income and to provide them with the tools and skills to participate in the growing tourism industry.

Project 2D: Sustainability Certification for the Blue Crab Fishery and Industry Improvements

Budget: \$200,000

One tool to increase economic opportunity for Chesapeake crabbers, and ensure a sustainable fishery is to ‘certify’ the blue crab fishery as a sustainable seafood product through the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). A successfully certified seafood product bears the MSC label of approval, or eco-label. Several large companies such as Whole Foods and Wal-Mart will only sell seafood certified as sustainable. It is likely that other companies will follow the lead. Certification insures market access and, often, increased market value.

Project 2E: Packaging Equipment Upgrade for Processors

Budget: \$392,000

Funding will provide the crab processing industry with innovative crab meat packaging equipment, to include cryogenic freezers and vacuum packing systems. This equipment will be used by the industry to produce new products that have a longer shelf life which could result in new markets and higher economic value.

Project 2F: Seafood Marketing Program for Blue Crabs

Budget: \$100,000

MD DNR is providing funding to the MDAg Seafood Marketing Program to alleviate potential of blue crab fishery disaster by creating economic opportunities for commercial crabbers and the processing industry. Improving stocks of blue crab will provide economic opportunities for the commercial crabbers only if they have a market to sell their product. This marketing program will conduct a public relations and advertising program designed to increase positive awareness of the Maryland crab industry to include promotion of hard crabs, soft crabs, and crab meat. This program will also market products developed using packaging equipment from Project 2E.

Project 2G: Feasibility Study for Composting Crab Waste from Processors

Budget: \$97,500

Crab “chum” disposal has historically challenged the crabmeat processing industry. Because this crabmeat processing by-product can produce strong smells and attract scavengers, it is often difficult to find suitable disposal sites. However, there is a very good demand for high-grade compost manufactured from crabmeat scrap shell and meat. Currently the crabmeat processing industry in Maryland generates approximately 4,000 tons of crab chum a year. Presently most processors have to pay a local farmer to take the crab chum and spread it on their farmland.

In past years, several local composting facilities have been used by the industry but these businesses failed due to poor management. A successful composting facility would directly help the bottom line financial situation of most crabmeat processors in Maryland. Maryland Environmental Service

will be contracted to conduct a feasibility study for composting crab waste from Dorchester County processors.

- **Project 3A: Oyster Bar Habitat Rehabilitation Projects**

Budget: \$1,526,542

Maryland will expand current work programs that employ commercial crabbers to conduct targeted oyster bar habitat rehabilitation projects. Oyster bars targeted for treatment, will be mapped with sonar and surveyed by divers to better understand the bottom condition and determine most effective rehabilitation strategy.

- **Project 3B: Derelict (Ghost) Pot Removal Program**

Budget: \$999,800

Maryland will employ commercial crabbers to participate in efforts to retrieve derelict crab pots from targeted areas of Chesapeake Bay. Efforts would be guided by a side-scan sonar data base that indicates areas of the greatest concentration of derelict crab pots – generally at the mouths of tributaries.

TOTAL BUDGET: \$14,995,000